

[Oliviero Frattolillo](#)

## A Standpoint in International History: South-East Asia's *Fūdosei* in Watsuji Tetsurō's Geocultural Appraisal

---

1. [Premise](#)
2. [Fūdo's cultural genesis](#)
3. [Phenomenology and subjectivity in the South-East Asia's \*fūdosei\*](#)
4. [Monsoon Asia's geo-history: absorbing the outside into the inside?](#)
5. [Overthrowing orthodoxy: from geocultural determinism to social constructivism](#)
6. [Bibliography](#)

### 1. Premise

---

*Fūdo* (Watsuji, 2001; Watsuji, 1961) is commonly considered one of the key works in the context of Japanese modern philosophy. Written by Watsuji Tetsurō in 1929, published in 1935 and translated into English in 1961 under the title "Climate and Culture", it reached high popularity among Japanese readers since its first publication, which took place in separate steps in the magazine *Shisō*, between 1928 and 1934. In many respects, this work was read and interpreted as a "canonical work", both on the strictly academic and literary level, which are usually related to the Japanese cultural exceptionalism. It was conceived, in the first instance, as a counter-response to the European existentialism and, in particular, to *Being and Time* (1927) of Martin Heidegger. It was aiming to offer an alternative vision to the Western ethics that eschews its own historical dimension, taking into consideration both its climatic and cultural dimensions.

Watsuji tried to define a series of paradigms, following a criterion based primarily on the contemplation and analysis of two factors that he believed of crucial importance: the climate and its influence on the cultural character of a given geographical area. The reading of the text immediately suggests the image of a curious intellectual, whose acute observations are the product of accurate sociological reflections on the cultural differences which are detectable between peoples and civilizations acquired during his journey through Asia and to Europe.

*Fūdo* puts the author, without any doubt, within the group of those "Westernized intellectuals" who, according to Maruyama Masao, have never fully participated in fascism or militarism (Maruyama, 1990, pp. 57-63). The resulting vision of the different peoples and of their civilization follows the East-West axis, which is inverse in respect to the common sense of Hegelian historical spirit prevailing in the Western cultural tradition. Moreover, in the analysis carried out by Watsuji, it is accompanied by that of a North-South axis. This further helps to clarify the ultimate purpose of his research, which lies in the normative nexus between man and nature, as it is placed at the base of the cultural identity, as well as in the shaping of the subject and in the definition of the

subjectivity itself.

The purpose of this article is to present the geo-cultural vision of South-East Asia as it emerges from *Fūdo*, framing it within the broader analytical framework concerning the relationship between man and nature, as well as the consequent subject-object dichotomy, as postulated by Watsuji. In this framework, the Southeast Asian region assumes a central role since it is intended, at the same time, as a geo-climatic, historical and cultural entity or, in other words, in its *fūdosei*. The approach taken by the philosopher turns out to be from the beginning extremely unusual. He argued, in fact, as follows: «I wish to treat the monsoon as a way of life-something that a hygrometer cannot do» (Watsuji, 1961, p. 18).

## 2. *Fūdo*'s cultural genesis

---

In February 1927, Watsuji left for Germany for an expected period of three years, thanks to a grant from the Japanese Ministry of Education. During those years, Germany was the "Mecca" of Japanese intellectuals and philosophers, giving rise to a real tradition of traveling in Europe (Iwakura, 1994). Since the Twenties, in fact, their field of speculative interest shifted from the neo-Kantian tradition towards the Husserlian phenomenology and, more importantly, to the existentialism of Martin Heidegger, who has come to be the ultimate conceptual reference for the Japanese philosophy of that time (Blocker, Starling, 2001, p. 128). The well-known intellectual Kuki Shūzō (1888-1941) had already lived in Europe for eight years, during which he drafted his famous *Iki no Kōzō* ("The Structure of the *Iki*") and which led him to take a close interest in Heideggerian thought.<sup>[1]</sup> However, unlike other Kyoto philosophers and intellectuals, such as Tanabe, Nishitani and Miki Kiyoshi, who travelled to Europe more or less in the same years, Watsuji did not spend all his time studying at the same university or under the guidance of one thinker.<sup>[2]</sup> In fact, after a period of study at Berlin University, he embarked on a long journey that would take him to Italy and Greece.

Watsuji was deeply impressed by the contrasts and differences raised between his country and those he visited. The impressions and the ideas that the philosopher ripened during his trip to Europe and across Asia resulted, after his return to Japan in 1928, in the writing of *Fūdo*. It is precisely the reading of the pages of this book to give us an immediate and clear idea about the inner journey characterizing this "politicized travel" and on the conclusions reached by the author (Watsuji, 2001).<sup>[3]</sup>

It could be said that the real cultural origin of the work lies primarily in Watsuji's willingness to draw a comparison between distant civilizations, which aimed at an inquiry in the nature of the nation and of the cultural feeling of belonging to a particular civilization. Here, the politicization of the travel has clearly taken the dimension of the exploration of "Otherness" (Jones, 2001, p. 41) and the way it has been conceptualized in peoples other than Japanese, through different speculative approaches about the structure of human relationality.

The main aim of *Fūdo* would be, therefore, to provide a philosophical response to the relationship between the climate and the cultural identity of a country. One of the central concepts around which the work itself has been conceived consists in the fact that the climate can be socio-politically constructed, since it is essentially an historical factor.

As it can be read in *Fūdo*:

Man's way of life has its own distinctive historical and climatic structure, the individuality of which is shown with the greatest clarity by climatic patterns governed by the limitations within a climate. Climate, essentially, is historical; so climatic patterns are at the same time historical patterns (Watsuji, 1961, pp.

Consequently, it is clear that for Watsuji certain population exist in specific climatic conditions. Therefore, one might say that philosophy cannot describe a climate. On the contrary, it is itself shaped by climate. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the climate -- as an historical factor -- is culturally formative.

The term *Fūdo* consists of two Japanese characters which mean, respectively, "wind" (*fū*) and "earth" (*do*). In the Japanese common lexicon, the term designates the geo-climatic characteristics of a given region,<sup>[4]</sup> but according to the arguments made by Watsuji, *Fūdo* is

[...] a general term for the natural environment of a given land, its climate, its weather, the geological and productive nature of the soil, its topographic and scenic features (Watsuji, 1961, p. 1).

The oversimplified translation of the word *Fūdo* with "climate" would be misleading and would not reflect the complex meaning that the author attributed to it (Berque, 1992, pp. 93-104).

### **3. Phenomenology and subjectivity in the South-East Asia's *fūdosei***

The first chapter of *Fūdo*, entitled "The basic principles of climate", looks like the most Heideggerian section of the entire work: here Watsuji enucleated an extremely important point of his theory on human existence (*ningen sonzai*). The distinction between the subject as *shutai* (or as agent-subject) and the subject as *shukan* (or as epistemological subject) was highly relevant for the construction of his ethical system (Nishida, 2001, p. 19; *Dai Nihon hyakka jiten*, Vol. X, 1968, p. 404; *Dai Nihon hyakka jiten*, Vol. XI, 1968, pp. 282-283). According to Sakai (1997, pp. 79-80), this particular way of translating the word "subject" in Japanese is inconceivable unless placed in the context of the so-called *jikaku sonzairon*, ie of the "ontology of self-awareness". Sakai argues that no term equivalent to that of subject (*shutai*) played a more important role in Japanese intellectual world prior to importation into the country of the European philosophical vocabulary, although in pre-Meiji period problems related to the concept of subject have been adduced to the Buddhist discourses. The concept of *jikaku* indicates, in general, "knowledge, value, duty, the mission of oneself". It is always linked to a personal experience and it was introduced in the history of philosophical thought in the Socratic formula of "Know thyself". In Japanese philosophy, in particular, it is a notion used often in the form of *jikaku sonzai*, formulated as an epistemological response to the German philosophical concept of *Existenz*. *Sonzairon* corresponds, in effect, to the category of the "ontology". In the philosophical thought of the twentieth century, the term was used in the narrow sense of "existence" and became the central problem of the Heideggerian philosophy. *Satori* (literally, "awakening", "enlightenment"), as used by Suzuki Daisetsu, in the sense of "sudden enlightenment", has become of use even in the Western languages and constitutes a core concept of Zen Buddhism. Since all men are considered a priori of the Buddha, and because the enlightenment has to be total, the tradition of radical Zen insisted on the "sudden, not gradual enlightenment". The distinction between the climate and the natural environment is the key for a proper understanding of Watsuji's speculative approach in the conceptualization of the climate-space factor, according to which it can not meet the classic subject/object category (Koschmann, 1981-82, pp. 609-631; Koschmann, 1993, pp. 395-423).<sup>[5]</sup>

The meaning which underlies the concept of *Fūdo* recalls a category that might be defined as space-social-climatic (*fūdosei*), in which are enclosed the basic elements of the human existence. In the case of South-East Asia:

[...] humidity typifies the violence of nature. [It] often combines with heat to assail man with violent deluges of rain of great force, savage storm winds, floods and droughts. This power is so vast that man is obliged to abandon all hope of resistance and is forced into mere passive resignation. [...] This force that teems with life tries to push out death, the death that is latent within man. With his own resources man cannot hope to withstand this force that is the source of life; so, in this case, resignation is resignation to life. [...] The distinctive character, then, of human nature in the monsoon zone can be understood as submissive and resignatory. It is the humidity that reveals this character (Watsuji, 1961, pp. 19-20).

The environmental space conceived around a single individual is a mere abstraction that would end up denying the authentic nature of the spatiality:

Environmental space arises when one eliminates the tension spread over subjective spatiality and then stands on the standpoint of the individual. [...] the negation of subjective spatiality, that is, the standpoint of the individual, establishes these sorts of space. In spite of this, the origin of space lies in the "betweenness" of subjects, that contradicts the standpoint of the individual (Watsuji, 1996, p. 178).

Watsuji's words clearly reflect the conceptual basis on which it is based the idea of "spatial subjectivity", which means that if we take into consideration the ontological value of the human existence -- where the Self includes, at the same time, the two dimensions of space and time, one cannot rely solely on the nature of the human being as mere individual, but as a human being who is in relation with the Other.

For Watsuji, the human being is an agent subject (*shutai*), rather than an epistemological subject (*shukan*). He is therefore a subject that is never isolated in the dynamics of the actions it performs. What distinguishes the *shutai* from the *shukan* lies mainly in the practical nature of the first, since it is not reconcilable with the opposition of subjective-objective. For this reason, Watsuji believed that the subjective dimension of the human being (*shutai-teki*) cannot be interpreted as an object opposed to the epistemological subject. The subject as *shutai*, finally, cannot be objectified for that which is the activity that objectifies itself. But, more importantly, the *shutai* is contextualizable both spatially and temporally, unlike the contemplative *shukan* which may, however, transcend both space and time (Yuasa, 1987, p. 40; Mazzei, 1999, pp. 22-23; *Dai Nihon hyakka jiten*, Vol. X, p. 24).<sup>[6]</sup>

Within *Fūdo*, Watsuji resorted to the "climatic category" in the South-East Asian region dealing with the summer season, in order to illustrate his point of view on the non subject-object duality:

Summer is one of the seasons; but a season is also a way of human livelihood. You do not define summer by mere statements of the height of the temperature or the sun's strength. On a mid-winter day with the temperature abnormally high, people may say "It's just like summer. " But they are not, in spite of such statements, conscious of being in the middle of the summer. This is also the feeling, as they near the South Seas, of travellers who have left Japan in mid-winter. A day or so after the ship leaves Hong Kong, the ship's company suddenly appears in white tropical uniform. The sun glints and flashes on the deep-blue sea, the thermometer rises, and people begin to perspire. Everyone thinks that here at last is a place where the summer never ends. However, it is when the traveller reaches Singapore, drives in the evening into the city, sees the luxuriant grasses and trees and hears the noisy hum of the insects [...] that, for the first time, he gets a strong fell of "summer" and is once more astonished when he thinks back to the contrast with the "winter" in Japan which he has left behind so recently (Watsuji, 1961, p. 21).

The philosopher intended here to demonstrate that the human being is, de facto, in the

contextualized world of Heidegger's *Dasein* -- he is outside, but inside it -- and hence it is not the summer that is 'outside', but ourselves. *Dasein* is an infinitesimal contextualization of the world, able to contemplate both Watsuji's concept of monsoon Asia's summer and the notion of "human existence". It is evident here the effort to emphasize the duality of spacio-temporal dimensions:

In other words, we find ourselves-ourselves as an element in the "mutual relationship" -- in "climate". [...] We stiffen, or we put on warm clothes, or we draw near the brazier when we feel cold. [...] thus, in our relationship with the cold, we come to engage ourselves, individually and socially, in various measures for protecting ourselves from the cold (Watsuji, 1961, p. 5).

The subject is not the central element on which Watsuji articulated his argument, but the Self in its social and individual concern, in relation to the climate and to its "spatiality". The Japanese scholar Koyanagi Masahiro, in an essay on *Fūdo*, coined the expression "Ethica climatis" just to indicate the central role of the "climatic spatiality" in the formulation of the concept of *ningen* ("human beings") and of *aidagara* ("in-betweenness") within Watsuji's theoretical framework (Koyanagi, 2002).

#### **4. Monsoon Asia's geo-history: absorbing the outside into the inside? ❏**

In *Fūdo* Watsuji identified the main characteristics of a trichotomous division of the world: pastoral (or Mediterranean), monsoon and desert. The first two would have determined the main differences existing between the European and the Asian peoples. The Mediterranean area is typically temperate, semi-arid and essentially pastoral. It requires, as a direct consequence, a relatively non-intensive agricultural work and the sowing can be done easily, without implying the arduous construction of terraces in order to cope with adverse climatic conditions. Thus, the nature in this area would have been viewed as benign and subservient to human beings; hence, the expression -- widely used in the West -- of "Mother Nature".

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in Watsuji's eyes, the Mediterranean did not appear as a big sea full of life and lush vegetation. On the contrary, he had the impression of facing an extension of salt and sterile water, so much to talk about it in terms of "sea-desert":

In the Mediterranean there are few living things, so few that it might well be called a sea of the dead (Watsuji, 1961, p. 65).

The Mediterranean nature would be, however, somewhat predictable and calculable, not dependent on violent and sudden natural calamities. Watsuji described it as *makiba* (pastoral), or "temperate", characterized by a climate alternating between humidity and dryness, as well as by fertile lands. In particular, the philosopher was struck by the fact that, unlike what happens in Japan, in this part of the world even the uncultivated land could be utilized for grazing, without necessarily being arranged to the use by human intervention. The absence of a defensive attitude against the nature would have made human beings more confident in it.

A mirror image of the Mediterranean area is the situation in Southeast Asia, where Watsuji saw the only natural and climatic element of continuity existing between the Asian continent and the Indian Ocean:

The word "monsoon" is said to have come from the Arabian *mausim*, meaning "season". As a result of the

peculiar relation between the continent of Asia and the Indian Ocean, during the six months of the summer, when the sun, after crossing the equator northwards, turns south and crosses it again, the monsoon blows land-wards from the south-west; but in the winter season, the monsoon blows seawards from the north-east. In the warm ocean belt, during the summer monsoon a strong current with a very high humidity content blows towards the land and gives rise to a climate unique in the world (Watsuji, 1961, p. 18).

The results arising from such climatic phenomena is represented by an intense humidity and very hot temperatures during the long summer months, interrupted by sudden downpours. Thus, the relationship between the human beings and nature here would not have been characterized by the resistance, but from a mere feeling of resignation.

To withstand humidity, one must summon up a two-fold energy, for resistance to humidity calls measures taken against both cold and heat. Yet, the inhabitants of the monsoon zone are by nature weak in resistance to their climate in comparison with those of either cold or desert zones. Where twice the resistance is required, they barely summon up the single strength mustered elsewhere (Watsuji, 1961, p. 19).

So, the spirit of resignation typical of South-East Asian peoples probably derives from the inclemency of nature: a harsh and unpredictable nature, which produced cultures where the human beings could not see the space around them in terms of geometric logic. Ultimately, while the Mediterranean climate would encourage human domination over nature, causing a gradual and predictable historical path, the monsoon climate would have determined a completely different culture:

The climate of the South Seas affords man a rich supply of food; hence his attitude is that all is well as long as he is blessed with nature's generosity. But, here, the relationship between man and nature contains no variety and, as a result, man is moulded to a passive and resignatory pattern. Not even the struggle against savage animals or deadly snakes can damage this mould (Watsuji, 1961, pp. 22-23).

But the "passive and resignatory" human attitude in the face of the 'unchangeable', that Watsuji ascribed to the people of these lands, does not mean demeaning others' human mind. On the contrary, in his own words:

But the monotony of the South Seas does not stem from insubstantiality. It is rather a monotony full of content, of power. The monotony, again, is not that of insubstantial feelings on the part of men who take interest in nothing; it is rather that of people who are ever agitated and burning with violent passions. There would indeed be startling advances if some way were found to break this mould and set this teeming power in motion (Watsuji, 1961, p. 23).

*Thus, a passive appreciation of nature and environment, which spontaneously would tend to absorb the outside into the inside, does not result in a nihilistic receptivity.*

## **5. Overthrowing orthodoxy: from geocultural determinism to social constructivism**

---

The theory of *fūdosei*, already assimilated to the *milieu humain* by Augustin Berque (Berque,

2000), is the cultural synthesis of anthropological and ethical elements able to overcome the constraints of any kind of environmental determinism. Its essence is rooted in the Sino-Confucian cultural tradition, specular to the Western heritage as regards both forms and values. It is precisely in the specificity of the human/nature, mind/body, and individual/community relations -- which has always deeply imbued the Sinitic civilization (like the Japanese culture) -- that the answer should be sought.

The deep reverence that Japanese culture reserves for nature excludes a priori any ethical conflict between man and nature (Brecher, 2000, p. 63) and, consequently, any conceivable form of environmental determinism. If the Western dialectic has gone, since the bygone past, structuring on the Cartesian dichotomy of *res cogitans/res extensa*, in Confucian Asia this was offset by the yin/yang, namely by the dialectic between complementary forces (good/bad; light/dark; day/night), which alternate and balance each other. On such basis, the dialectical efficacy of the Greek *logos* do not find any *raison d'être*, leaving room to that of relationality. It is exactly within this dialectical relationship that one may find the concept of ontological "monism": the non-dual dimension between body and mind, the individual and society.

The carnal interconnection exists wherever there is *aidagara*, although the modality of relationship may differ. We may find this not only between husband and wife, but it is also visible among friends. Feeling a person like a friend means getting closer to... Seen in this light, the interconnection between carnal bodies includes the moment of the experience, a moment that will develop naturally in a psychological relation. This relation is neither physical nor psychological, and nor the synthesis of the two. In general, it is not an objective relationality, but a subjective relationality in the carnal body (Watsuji, Vol. X, 1978, p. 336).

In Watsuji's eyes, then, the notion of relationship (the subjective interrelation) is conceived as "carnal interconnection". He argued that human relations are never simply psychological, nor simply physical, and not to be considered as if the mind is separated from the body. According to the eminent philosopher Yuasa Yasuo, Watsuji's major achievement consists in the urgency to reflect on the human bonds as relations established by our carnal interconnections in the space surrounding us (Yuasa, 1987, pp. 47-48). And if the space coincides with the historical *basho* -- as theorized by the Kyoto School's maitre-a-penser, Nishida Kitarō -- it goes without saying that the individual and the social constitute a "dialectical unity" which may transpose itself from the national to the international dimension, namely from the Japanese context to any other type of *fūdosei*, or in any other place of the world. The message inherently present in *Fūdo*, as well as widely discernible from other Watsuji's works, is transpositional and, therefore, constructive. The notion of *aidagara*, rather than an offensive to Heidegger's *Dasein*, intended to act as a constructive warning towards Western philosophy and culture, which limited to considering only a part of the meaning of human existence in an individualist perspective.

In Watsuji's view, the biggest mistake made by Western intellectuals in the twentieth century was to have divided the study of the individual (psychology) from that of the society as a whole (sociology), which led to the birth of the international relations as a science in itself. Ethics, politics and international relations could not have been addressed as sciences in themselves, but were incorporated into a single discipline defined as *ningengaku* (a sort of anthropology) which would have excluded distinctions between various levels of analysis. So, the *fūdogaku* (the theory of *fūdo*) would have been related to Japan, in particular, not to the Asian continent in general: it would have served the construction of different civilizations as expression of the dialectical nature of *ningen*. There was no reason to favor the development of a civilization over another: all cultures have developed according to the climatic and environmental conditions of their territorial spaces. But, what is most meaningful, in this dynamic the climate is not "determinant" but, echoing the

philosopher's words, it reveals itself as "culturally constructive". Cultures, intellectual traditions, and even the technologies, would be "climatically specific". Rather than deterministically, the dialectic of space/society is conceived in constructive terms, so that we might talk about some form of social constructivism, in a broad sense.

Watsuji did not embrace the ideas of environmental determinism that were expressed and defended by the German geopolitical tradition. Japanese intellectuals of his age had to come to terms with issues related to the process of Westernization of the country, trying to resolve the tension caused by the opening to Western influences and the preservation of national identity. Watsuji was a part of them, and his education, ranging from the history of Japanese thought to Western philosophy, allowed him to have speculative potentials belonging, simultaneously, to a tradition and another, showing that he also drew much from the modern trend of social phenomenology.

The entire analysis undertaken in *Fūdo* is, in fact, based on a phenomenological approach of the analysis of human experience, both in socio-anthropological and ethical terms. Particularly evident is the connection that, in this specific regard, it is possible to trace between Watsuji and Alfred Schütz's approach, within his school of "phenomenological sociology". According to Schütz, it is in the sphere of the so-called "social world" that the individual shares with others a community of space and time. From this experiential mode derives the being, the social relationships of the world-environment, by which all others are originated. As it is known, Schütz defined as *Thou-orientation* the "attentional turning" towards the Other, which may be unilateral or reciprocal. The reciprocal Thou-orientation gives rise to the relation in the form of *We*, i. e. the "We-relation".

The constructivist ethics of *aidagara*, and of the *milieu humain*, elaborated by Watsuji criticizes a tradition of Western thought concerning, among other things, the social sciences and international relations specifically. If, in fact, as suggested by Christopher G. Jones, one emphasizes the practical dimension that the term "international" has taken in the West, it becomes clear that it does not aspire to anything other than transcendence, or an expansion, of the national dimension of the politics (Jones, 2003). However, this has been building on the basic concept of the individual in the sense attributed to the Heideggerian *Mensch*, to which Watsuji opposes sharply the *ningen*, which sums up to the individual and the community in a sort of dialectical tension. On the other hand, no moral action may be separated from a dialectical movement which directs both of these directions. If you decide to accept the assertion of Watsuji, according to which the meaning of the history of the world rests on the ways in which the human being made himself into various types of climatic and historical typologies, we need at the same time to recognize that he clearly stated that no civilization could never be considered supposedly "superior" compared to other. But even more, that the understanding of cultural differences on the basis of these theoretical and epistemological assumptions, can still offer a valuable key to understanding geopolitics, for a world in which the process of globalization strengthens, day after day, links of interdependence between states. This may be valid as well as for the interpretation of some delicate politico-cultural phenomena, for which the understanding of the *Other*, even on the basis of *fūdosei*, has taken on extreme importance, not least for what has been postulated by Samuel P. Huntington, related to the "clash of civilizations".

The correct conceptual dimension in which appears, therefore, South-East Asia's *fūdosei* for Watsuji cannot be far from appearing a mere dialectical opposition subject/object, nor could be based on a process of self-perception of the individual through which reaching a full expression of the Self. It reflects the structure of the human being as *ningen* in the dynamics of its nature, its constant movement, the reciprocal interaction between the individual and the social, the climate and history, the space and time. The text reads as follows:

Let me give a concrete example. The Botanical Gardens in Penang differ from those in Singapore in their location. They are built in a valley between low hills. But the impression of the broad-leaved trees ranged on these hills is exactly like that of Japan in mid-summer; there is the same feeling of strength and power as the pasanias and oaks of Japan give when they grow luxuriant in a mere two or three weeks during the hottest season of the year. However, in Penang, this process continues throughout the year. But when you leave the gardens and, going through the forest of broad palms, begin to climb the hills, there are grasses with white heads like the pampas, and small purple flowers like autumn grasses. [...] At the top of the hill, the atmosphere is even cooler and trees similar to the Japanese cypress or magnolia have the same sad shape of branch or trunk as those of any Japanese garden. [...] Hence, even though there are no alternations of seasons here, yet there are included within the "climate" various transformations corresponding exactly to the effects of such alternations. In other words, although there is no temporal variation, there is spatial variation. And, for such as can resign themselves passively to this, the monotony of the South Seas is one of season only; it is not a monotony of content (Watsuji, 1961, pp. 23-24).

South-East Asia's *fūdosei* is to be understood, therefore, as a subjective expression of the local human existence, which is why it can not simply represent the natural environment, but "the place of geographical/cultural/social attitudes and of expectations related to a specific region of the earth" (Carter, 1996, p. 336):

In the desert, man can resist the threat of death with the resources of his own life: there, resignation is resignation to death (Watsuji, 1961, p. 20).

The interaction between the Self and what it might be said the "spatial concept" of *Fūdo*, also arises in essentially temporal terms, for which Watsuji felt the imperative to incorporate both these aspects within his analysis. He certainly did not intend to eliminate the temporal dimension from the concept of the Self, so that the same author did not hesitate to recognize the important role played by the "historicity" of the Self. Nevertheless, the temporality and spatiality of the Self appeared to him as inextricably linked to each other. The space, as a climate in which the human being finds himself, is the true ontological dimension in which Watsuji's analysis places the speculation around the concept of the Self and that, in its turn, will be determined by the same expressions of it. Consequently, when one recognizes the fundamental importance of the spatial dimension of the Self, the concept resulting can in no way be linked to that of the individual conscience, which is rather an expression of Western existentialist tradition.

Concluding his discourse on South-East Asia, indeed, Watsuji wrote as follows:

Change depends upon the conquest of climate. This latter can only be achieved by a climatic path-by the attainment, historically, of an awareness of climate. This done, man may surmount climate (Watsuji, 1961, p. 39).

## 6. Bibliography

---

- Befu, H. (1997). Watsuji Tetsurō's Ecological Approach. Its Philosophical Foundation. In P. J. Asquith, A. Kalland (Eds.), *Japanese images of nature. Cultural perspectives*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Berque, A. (2000). *Écoumène: introduction à l'étude des milieux humains*. Paris : Belin.
- Berque, A. (1992). Identification of the Self in Relation to the Environment. In N. R. Rosenberger (Ed.), *Japanese Sense of Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berque, A. (2000). *Logique du lieu et dépassement de la modernité. Du lieu nishidien vers*

*d'autres mondes*, 2. Paris : Ousia.

- Blocker, H. G., Starling, C. I. (2001). *Japanese Philosophy*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Brecher, W. P. (2000). *An investigation of Japan's relationship to nature and environment*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Carter, R. E. (1996). Introduction to Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku. In *Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku. Ethics in Japan*, Albany, USA: State University of New York Press.
- De Silva, P. (1998). *Environmental philosophy and ethics in Buddhism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Press.
- *Dai Nihon hyakka jiten. Encyclopedia Japonica* (1968), 10, 11. Tokyo: Shogakukan.
- Dilworth, D. (1974). Watsuji Tetsurō: Cultural Phenomenologist and Ethician. *Philosophy East and West*, 24.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1996). *Japanese civilization. A comparative view*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Frattolillo, O. (2006). *Il Giappone e l'Occidente. Dalla rivolta culturale al simposio sul «superamento della modernità»*. Napoli: L'Orientale editrice.
- Frattolillo, O. (2012). *Interwar Japan beyond the West. The search for a new subjectivity in World History*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Frattolillo, O. (2005). Kindaika ni okeru Watsuji Tetsurō no kenkai. *Okinawa kenritsu geijutsu daigaku kiyō*, 13.
- Heisig, J. W., Maraldo, J. C. (1995). *Rude awakenings. Zen, the Kyoto School, & the question of nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Hutterer, K. L., Rambo, A. T., Lovelace, G. W. (1985). *Cultural values and human ecology in Southeast Asia*. USA: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan.
- Iwakura, S. (1994). *Il Giappone scopre l'Occidente: una missione diplomatica (1871-73)*. Roma: Istituto Giapponese di Cultura.
- Jones, C. S. (2003). *Interman and the Inter in International Relations: Watsuji Tetsurō and the Ethics of the Inbetween. Global Society*, 17 (2).
- Jones, C. S. (2001). The philosopher remembers home. Watsuji Tetsurō and the imperative of climate. *The East*, 35 (5).
- Karaki, J., Watsuji Tetsurō. In *Kindai Nihon shisō taikei*. Tokyo: Chikuma-shobō.
- Koschmann, J. V. (1981). The Debate on Subjectivity in Postwar Japan: its Foundations of Modernism as a Political Critique. *Pacific Affairs*, 54.
- Koschmann, J. V. (1993). Intellectuals and Politics. In A. Gordon (Ed.), *Postwar Japan as history*. USA: University of California Press.
- Koyanagi, M. (2002). *Watsuji rinrigaku to utaki no ētosu. Fūdo no echika no tame ni*. Okinawa: Ryūkyū daigaku (University of the Ryukyus).
- Maruyama, M. (1990). *Le radici dell'espansionismo giapponese*. Torino: Fondazione Agnelli.
- Mazzei, F. (1999). *Japanese particularism and the crisis of Western modernity*. Venezia: Università Cà Foscari.
- Mazzei, F., Volpi, V. (2006). *Asia al centro*. Milano: EGEA.
- Nishida, K. (2001). *Il corpo e la conoscenza*. Venezia: Cafosarina.
- Sakai, N. (1999). *Translation & subjectivity. On "Japan" and cultural nationalism*. Massachusetts: University of Minnesota Press.
- Satō, Y., Katayama, Y., Kumano, S. (1999). *Yomigaeru Watsuji Tetsurō*. Kyoto: Nakanishiya.
- Tōsen, Y. (1973). *Hito to shisō: Watsuji Tetsurō*. Tokyo: Mitsui shobō.
- Tsuda, M. (2001). *Watsuji Tetsurō kenkyū*. Japan: Aoki shoten.
- Umehara, T. (1974). Watsuji Tetsurō-shū. In *Kindai Nihon shisō taikei*. Tokyo: Chikuma-

shobō.

- *Watsuji Tetsurō zenshū, 1-20*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- Watsuji, T. (1961). *Climate and Culture*. Japan: The Hokuseido Press.
- -- . (1978). *Watsuji Tetsurō Zenshū*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- -- . (1996). *Watsuji Tetsurō's rinrigaku [Ethics in Japan]* . Albany, USA: State University of New York Press.
- -- . (1997). *Ningengaku toshite no rinrigaku*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- -- . (2001). *Fūdo. Ningengaku-teki kōsatsu*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- -- . (2001). *Italia koji junrei*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- -- . (2006). *Pellegrinaggio alle antiche chiese d'Italia* (transl. by O. Frattolillo). Palermo: L'Epos.
- Yamada, K. (1987). *Watsuji Tetsurō ron*. Tokyo: Kadensha.
- Yuasa, Y. (1970). Watsuji Tetsurō. Kakuretaru jiga. In *Kindai Nihon no tetsugaku to jitsuzon shisō*. Tokyo: Sōbunsha.
- Yuasa, Y. (1981). *Watsuji Tetsurō. Kindai Nihon tetsugaku no unmei*. Tokyo: Chikuma gakuei bunko.
- Yuasa, Y. (1987). *The Body. Toward an Eastern mind-body theory*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Copyright © 2012 [Oliviero Frattolillo](#)

Oliviero Frattolillo. «A Standpoint in International History: South-East Asia's *Fūdosei* in Watsuji Tetsurō's Geocultural Appraisal». *Dialegesthai. Rivista telematica di filosofia* [in linea], anno 14 (2012) [inserito il 10 luglio 2012], disponibile su World Wide Web: <<http://mondodomani.org/dialegesthai/>>, [\*\*46 B], ISSN 1128-5478.

## Note

---

1. In 1933 Kuki published in Japan the work *Haideggā no tetsugaku* (The philosophy of Heidegger) and it seems that he himself was to introduce Heidegger's thought to Jean Paul Sartre, when he was still a student. ☒
2. Nishitani Keiji, Tanabe Hajime and Miki Kiyoshi they stayed mainly in Germany, studying in the wake of such thinkers as Rickert, Husserl and Heidegger. ☒
3. The impressions acquired by Watsuji during a significant period of his journey through Europe, especially in Italy, resulted in the work *Itaria koji junrei* (Pilgrimage to the ancient churches of Italy), which was very important in the development of his climatic theory (the book has been translated into Italian: see the bibliography). ☒
4. Moreover, it should be noted that already during the Nara era in Japan (710-784 AD) the term *fūdoki* (from which Watsuji probably inherited his *Fūdo*) was used to indicated a collection of reports regarding the natural resources, geophysical conditions and oral traditions of each of the sixty or so Japanese provinces in that era. *Fūdoki* is currently used as a generic term to describe the customs, culture and economic life in the local regions of the country. ☒
5. It should be noted that the "modern subjectivity" constituted in Japan one of the most debated dilemmas of the Meiji era, as of the second postwar period. Koschmann stated that an explicit rejection of the recent past constituted the condition for the Japanese to participate in intellectual debate during the early postwar years. According to him, the post-war community - which he defined as a "community of contrition" - was created as a consequence of the iconoclastic effect of the defeat, as well as of the discredit felt toward political institutions. ☒

6. In assuming the *shutai* as the Subject, Watsuji moved from a critique of the notion of self-awareness in the modern philosophical tradition related to Descartes. In this logic, the fundamental mode of existence is the "conscious Subject" (*shukan*). While the Cartesian philosophy, and the long legacy that it left in the history of Western thought, is founded on the eternal dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, mind and body, man and nature, and still between man and God, thesis and antithesis, the sinitic civilization followed different paths, avoiding to conceive such stringent oppositions. It is not based on a static concept, but on a dynamic view of the reality which is constantly evolving. Watsuji's thought fits perfectly in this cultural context and his notion of 'space' is based on a fundamental monad made up of body and mind - *shinjin-ichin'yō* - a fusion between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, under which it is conceived the 'spatial existence of the body'. The *shinjin-ichin'yō* is a very common Buddhist notion, especially in the texts of Zen Buddhism, and indicates the oneness of body and mind. 🙏

---

Copyright © *Dialegesthai* 2012 (ISSN 1128-5478) | [filosofia@mondodomani.org](mailto:filosofia@mondodomani.org) | [Direzione e redazione](#)

[Editoriale](#) | [Indice cronologico](#) | [Indice degli autori](#) | [Contatti](#) | [Collegamenti](#) | [Collana](#)